

# Unmanned planes look for Katrina survivors

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Unmanned, small aircraft were being used this week to search for survivors of Hurricane Katrina in the first domestic use of such surveillance vehicles.

Providing speed, portability and access, two unmanned aerial vehicles surveyed storm-damaged communities in Mississippi searching for trapped survivors.

"The two UAVs packed a one-two punch," said Robin Murphy of the University of South Florida and director of the National Science Foundation-supported Center for Robot-Assisted Search and Rescue. "The fixed-wing provided a quick overview of an area over several miles, but the use of the miniature helicopter to hover by buildings and on roofs -- and to takeoff straight up -- really offers new functionality."

One of the UAVs is a 4-foot-long airplane with mounted video and thermal imagery cameras that can capture details from as far away as 1,000 feet.

The other UAV used in the search is a camera-equipped, miniature, electric helicopter that can hover at heights approaching 250 feet and zoom its camera to peer inside windows or scan distant rooftops.

Within two hours, the vehicles reportedly provided responders with information indicating no survivors were trapped and cresting floodwaters did not pose an additional threat.

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